

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Providing a major new transportation facility in west-central Illinois involves a substantial commitment of resources. Proper planning of the facility is essential to assure that the resources used are maximized, user needs are met, and engineering and environmental issues are addressed.

IDOT is committed to providing needed mobility for west-central Illinois. To fulfill the mobility need, IDOT recognizes it is essential to have communities' and resource agencies' input in the study in order to collect data, identify engineering and environmental concerns, address community concerns, and to accommodate community goals and land use plans. IDOT used several public involvement methods to maximize the opportunity for public and agency input. These included an Advisory Council, meetings with the 336 Coalition, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) meeting, and public meetings. In addition, interviews were conducted with 30 individuals and organizations in and around the study area. In the Cities of Peoria, Canton, Bushnell, Farmington, Macomb, and in each of the primary and secondary communities, members of the study group interviewed the primary employers, planners, and economic development officials.

6.2 336 COALITION

Interest in the IL 336 project was revived with the formation of the 336 Coalition in 1998. The 336 Coalition's website states "The 336 Coalition is a group of concerned citizens, business people, and government officials focused on the construction of a four-lane highway running from Peoria to Macomb." The Coalition publishes two newsletters each year, and their website indicates that they have a mailing list of 4,000. The website further states:

The lack of a modern four-lane highway is viewed as the greatest cause of stagnant to declining populations and economies in many of the area's communities and for the highest unemployment rates in the State of Illinois. The Coalition has discovered strong support in Peoria, Macomb, and Quincy for the benefits Highway 336 could bring to those areas of Illinois. The Greater Peoria Airport would also be a benefactor of our efforts.

The Coalition advocates construction of the new routes as an expressway, "with as many at grade crossings as possible."

The IDOT study team met with the 336 Coalition Board of Directors three times in 2003. The first meeting was held on February 5, 2003, in Canton. IDOT study team members and the 336 Coalition Board of Directors were introduced. The study team presented a brief overview of the project and schedule. The Board was pleased that the study had begun but expressed concern about the time required to complete the project through construction.

At the July 9 meeting, the IDOT study team gave a progress update to the 336 Coalition. The adjusted corridors included in this report were presented and explained. The 336 Coalition members were invited to the public meeting. After the presentation the study team addressed questions from the Coalition, then the Coalition members were invited to review displays of the corridors that included environmental and other information obtained to date. IDOT team members were available at the displays for discussion. The Chairman of the 336 Coalition Board of Directors stated that the Coalition would support whichever corridor was selected. There were also discussions about costs of freeway vs. expressway and the question of whether public land could be used. A comment was made that Corridor A would be attractive if constructed close to Canton, but unattractive if it was constructed north and west of Double T.

The third meeting was held on January 7, 2004 during which the recommended corridor was presented to the 336 Coalition.

The agenda, presentation materials, and meeting minutes for the first two 336 Coalition meetings are included in Appendix D.

6.3 ADVISORY COUNCIL

An Advisory Council was formed early in the planning process with representatives of local communities and resource agencies to obtain their input regarding the 336 project. The members of the Advisory Council have multiple roles. They are to advise IDOT's study team on project issues as they are presented during Council meetings, communicate local concerns and values, act as a resource for community and agency information exchange, serve as a local resource for the general public, and identify opportunities for local meetings. Understanding community concerns early in the planning process assists the study in planning a facility that is compatible with community goals and meets regional needs. It is the intent of the Advisory Council to maintain communication with the local communities throughout the duration of the project.

Three Advisory Council meetings were held in 2003, all at the Donaldson Center in Canton. During the first meeting, held on April 10, the Advisory Council was presented with an overview of the study process, background information about the 336 project, and the corridors under study. The Council then broke into focus groups lead by members of the IDOT study team. Some of the views expressed by Council members that they believed reflected the views of the people they represent are summarized below:

- Most of the people they represented would prefer Corridor A or B, partly because Corridor C is already congested on the eastern end. Corridor C, they felt, would be especially unpopular if it did not come close to Canton.
- Impacts to prime farmland would be very important; although, several agreed that hunting lands (strip mines and woodlands) are more valuable monetarily.

- Access to the Peoria would be very important.
- Commuters would prefer a freeway, and farmers would prefer an expressway.

Input was received on economic and environmental issues, and a suggestion was made on corridor adjustment that was subsequently incorporated.

During the July 7, 2003 meeting, the IDOT study team gave a progress update to the Advisory Council similar to that presented on July 9 to the 336 Coalition, discussed above. The adjusted corridors were presented, and the Advisory Council members were invited to the public meeting. This was followed by informal discussions of the updated displays, which included the corridors on an aerial photo base with environmental and other information. The study team received input on suggested additions and changes to the displays.

Some of the views expressed by Council members that they believed reflected the views of the people they represent:

- Proximity of the roadway to communities would be very important. One member pointed out that 70 percent of the Fulton County population is in a narrow corridor from Lewiston to Canton to Farmington.
- Use of existing roadway right-of-way would be important.

The last Advisory Council meeting of 2003 was held on December 11, and included a presentation of the study results and the preferred corridor.

The agenda, presentation materials, list of attendees, and meeting minutes/summaries for all three Advisory Council meetings are included in Appendix D.

6.4 NEPA/SECTION 404 CONCURRENCE MEETING

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) established the nation's legal basis for ensuring the protection and enhancement of the quality of the environment. Early and ongoing coordination with environmental agencies and the public is one of the most important aspects of the NEPA process. Early coordination helps to avoid delays later in the process, identify and respond to potential conflicts, and ensure appropriate consideration of environmental values.

The first step in the NEPA process is to publish a notice of intent (NOI) to perform an environmental impact statement (EIS) in the federal register. The federal register NOI for the IL 336 project was published on February 5, 2003 and is included in Appendix D.

To comply with and achieve the goals of NEPA and Section 404 of the CWA, meetings were held with environmental agencies on April 25 and April 28, 2003 at the IDOT District 4 offices in Peoria. The April 25 meeting was held specifically for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,

who were unable to attend the April 28 meeting. The overall purpose of the meetings was to inform the agencies of the study and to obtain concurrence from the agencies on the Purpose and Need Statement, a draft of which had been forwarded to attendees for review prior to the meetings. The IDOT study team reviewed the Purpose and Need Statement, discussed exhibits, and responded to questions. Concurrence on the Purpose and Need Statement was received from the group members at both meetings. The Corps of Engineers representative commented that wide corridors are preferred because they allow more flexibility in alignment selection. The handout, presentation materials, list of attendees, and meeting minutes are included in Appendix D.

6.5 INTERVIEWS WITH INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

This section summarizes the issues identified from the 30 interviews conducted early in the study process, with primary employers, planners, and economic development officials. Issues identified from the interviews are organized by county.

6.5.1 Peoria County Issues

- Connecting 336 close to the airport on 474 is very important. Individuals identified the two exits (3 and 5) north of the airport as preferred.
- The airport is undergoing planning for the creation of a third runway. This runway would mirror the current NW- SE runway, slightly to the north and west.
- The airport is the shipping point for carriers such as FedEx for Central Illinois. Emery handles the heavy freight forwarding for Caterpillar out of the airport with one inbound and one outbound daily flight.
- Residential and commercial growth in Peoria County is occurring in the northwest section of Peoria City. The “Shops at Grand Prairie,” a new regional mall anchored by Bergners, Galyans, Old Navy, Borders, Linens and Things, and Home Depot recently opened in northwest Peoria.
- Primary transportation issues for the Peoria community include completing the ring around the City with the addition of another bridge and connecting Peoria to Chicago via Route 29.
- Developable land is more readily available along the northern alternatives in Peoria County.
- The southern route is of concern to many logistics operators who would rather see a direct connection into Interstate 474 than going through the congestion of Bartonville. (These comments were based on the assumption that the congested portion of US 24 would not be upgraded.)

6.5.2 Fulton County Issues

- The Canton community is facing economic distress.
- Canton is a bedroom community for Peoria with an average commute time of 40 minutes.
- The community has still not made up for the loss of International Harvester in the mid-1980s. The site is still vacant although plans have been developed to raze the site and redevelop it as a community center.
- The population base of Canton is aging.
- Growth is to the north of the community – both residential and commercial. Wal-Mart is expected to build a Super Center on the northern edge of town in the next few years and close its existing store.
- A new ethanol plant is under development to the south of town. The 30-acre project will employ an estimated 50 people once it is operating in mid 2004.
- Spoon River College – Many night programs would be more popular if students are able to make it from their jobs in Peoria to class by 6:00 p.m. The average student drives alone with a 20-30 minute commute.

6.5.3 McDonough County Issues

- Western Illinois University suffers from the perceived inaccessibility by students, distributors, and conventioners. Though the student body has grown, the university feels that it can better serve the population of central and western Illinois through the completion of IL 336 to the east.
- Chicago area distributors are reluctant to service the Macomb market because of inaccessibility. Many goods and services are being purchased from Iowa companies.
- The manufacturers that are in the community are there because of historical reasons.
- 39% of the employment in the City of Bushnell is in the manufacturing sector, a higher ratio than the surrounding communities even though it is not located along a major roadway. Manufacturing employment is divided between food/feed processing and metal working. Bushnell is home to Vaughn and Bushnell, the largest hammer manufacturer in the United States.
- Western Illinois University has the ability and willingness to host large “stay over” functions during the summer. According to the university, groups looking to book functions of this type feel that the university is “inaccessible.”

6.6 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings were held on three consecutive evenings, August 5, 6, and 7, 2003 at the following locations:

- Tuesday, August 5, 2003 – ITOO Society Hall in Peoria
- Wednesday, August 6, 2003 – Canton High School
- Thursday, August 7, 2003 – Macomb VFW Post 1921

The same material was presented at all three meetings. The hearing format was open house with no formal presentations. In each case, several large exhibits were placed throughout the meeting room for the public to view. One large exhibit showed the entire study area on an aerial photo base map, with adjusted corridors shown, and with environmental and cultural features. Similar but more detailed exhibits of the Peoria, Canton, and Macomb areas were presented. A handout described the study process and included a comparison of the corridors. The public was invited to make oral and written comments. A copy of the handout from the public meeting is included in Appendix D.

6.6.1 Summary of Public Meeting Comments

Approximately 752 people total attended the August 5, 6, 7 public meetings. Some 315 people provided comments on the project: 285 were in favor, 23 were opposed.

In general, opponents to the project expressed the belief that the project would not be an efficient use of public funds. Many of those who opposed also believed that the project would not bring economic benefit to the area. A few were opposed on environmental grounds. Many who were opposed still named a preferred corridor that was the least undesirable in their opinion. There does not seem to be any organized opposition to the project; those opposed were expressing their views as private citizens.

Of those expressing support for the project, most believe that the road would help the area economically. There is organized support for the project from the 336 Coalition, local government agencies, and others. The following summarizes the views of those who expressed a preference for particular corridor segments:

- East A
 - In general, the people stating that business and economic interests were most important favored this route.
 - Some people that expressed an interest in protecting the natural environment preferred this route as least damaging.
 - Commenters opposed to loss of farmland found this route to be the least favorable.

- East B
 - The explanation for selecting this route was often an opposition to the amount of possible farmland impacts on East A.
- East C
 - Many people expressed an opinion against this corridor based on cost, lack of effectiveness in serving the area, and some environmental concerns.
 - Those favoring this corridor usually stated that it is partly constructed and therefore should be cheaper and faster to implement.
- West A
 - Many people stated that the west bypass of Canton had to be close to Canton, the airport, and the college. If it was constructed close, they supported it. If it was constructed 3 or more miles west of Canton, they did not support it.
 - Most of the comments on both West A and West B were based on whether or not the commenter had interests in the corridor. Those that had farms in one corridor preferred the other corridor. Bushnell interests preferred A because it benefits the industrial/commercial interests there.
- West B
 - As with west A, the opinions seemed largely dependent on whether the commenter had personal interests in this corridor.
- West C
 - There were few reasons given in support of this corridor.
 - Some people noted that this corridor was their least preferred because of costs, environmental reasons, and because it did not serve their traffic needs particularly well.

Following is the summary of those who expressed a corridor preference:

Corridor	West Segments	East Segments
A	93	111
B	108	74
A or B	29	30
C	13	28

As shown in the table, the greatest support is for the east segment of A combined with the west segment of B, or Corridor AB, the corridor recommended in this report and selected following the 1970s study.

6.7 PUBLIC HEARING

The draft corridor report with the recommended Corridor AB was approved by IDOT on December 29, 2003 and made available to the public. Public hearings to receive input on the recommended corridor were held on three consecutive evenings, February 24, 25, and 26, 2004 at the following locations, with the same materials presented at each meeting:

- Tuesday, February 24, 2004 – ITOO Society Hall in Peoria
- Wednesday, February 25, 2004 – Canton High School
- Thursday, February 26, 2004 – Macomb VFW Post 1921

As with the public meetings, ads for the hearings were published in local newspapers of greatest circulation in Peoria, Macomb, and Canton. The hearings were also informal, with large exhibits distributed throughout the meeting room for the public to view and IDOT staff available for questions and discussion. The large exhibit with corridors was similar to the one used at the public meetings in August, but the recommended corridor was highlighted. Exhibits that illustrated the difference between an expressway and freeway, and exhibits that showed standard right-of-way requirements were also displayed. The draft corridor report was available for review. A handout summarized the results of a traffic study done in 2003, and it presented an updated comparison of alternatives, with the rationale for selection of the recommended alternative. The public was invited to make oral and written comments. A copy of the handout from the public hearings is included in Appendix D.

6.7.1 Summary of Public Hearing Comments

Over 700 people attended the public hearings and more than 250 provided comments. IDOT responded to each comment in writing. Comments and response letters are included in Appendix D.

6.7.1.1 Corridor Adjustment Based on Public Comment

About 34 comments from the hearing plus a separate 600-signature petition stated a preference for a highway option closer to Bushnell—either Corridor A or a widening of the recommended corridor to bring it closer to Bushnell. These commenters and petitioners believe that Bushnell is a significant enough center of population and industry that better access for Bushnell should have been given more consideration in the study. A "Route 336 Position Paper" endorsed by the City of Bushnell and other Bushnell and Macomb area organizations presented the case for consideration of highway options closer to Bushnell. The position paper is included in Appendix D.

Based on this public input, the recommended corridor was expanded in the vicinity of Bushnell, to provide alternatives that are closer to the city. This adjustment is shown in Figure 5-2 and was presented in the May 2004 newsletter, which is included in Appendix D. The adjustment

was also announced in the same newspapers that advertised the public meetings and hearings (also included in Appendix D).

6.7.1.2 Other Comments

Comments and responses are included in Appendix D and summarized here.

Many people simply expressed their support for the project. They were thanked for their response and given a copy of the newsletter showing the corridor adjustment.

About 27 people expressed concern about farmland impact. IDOT realizes the importance of prime farmland and endeavors to develop alignments that minimize taking farmland and other resources. In a project of this size inevitably some farmland will need to be acquired.

About 6 people expressed opposition to the project because they believe the fiscal situation in Illinois does not warrant constructing new highways. IDOT acknowledges that there are no funds allocated to this project beyond the cost of the current study. IDOT initiates the planning process in order to use federal highway funds for projects. The planning process takes years to complete so it must be done in advance so that the project is ready to go when funds become available.

One commenter expressed a concern about taking habitat, wildlife areas, and timberland instead of farmland. This commenter felt that it is generally preferable to take farmland rather than more natural areas. IDOT considers many issues when developing roadway alignments and among them are impacts on both farmland and timberland. Throughout the corridor, IDOT will be developing at least two initial alignments that balance the various issues differently. These alignments and others will be presented at future public meetings. Generally the most preferred alignment would be revised based on comments and concerns and shown at least one more time to the public before design begins. The rationale for selection, with a full discussion of impacts, will be presented in the Environmental Impact Statement for the project.

About 17 people included an alignment suggestion in their comment. Several people suggested using former mine haul roads. IDOT will evaluate these suggestions and implement them if appropriate.

Several commenters indicated a preference for using existing highway and railroad rights-of-way for the new highway. IDOT generally begins by developing an alignment that uses the right-of-way of existing roadways. If that option has many impacts, for example, a relatively large number of residential relocations, IDOT then evaluates whether other alignments should be developed that reduce some of the impacts of the first alignment. Existing railroad rights-of-way will also be evaluated.

A few people indicated opposition to the project or recommended corridor but did not indicate why.